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"I'm not concerned about the leak, I'm concerned that it happened but there is nothing contemporaneous that I'm aware of."

BIDEN  
on leaked US documents



# Eid trip to north gets expensive

Bus service providers overcharge, take advantage of no set fare, poor monitoring

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and SAJJAD HOSSAIN

Coaches are overcharging people heading for the north by up to Tk 900, taking advantage of the Eid rush, poor monitoring, and no set fare for long-haul air-conditioned buses.

Operators of non-AC buses have also joined the bandwagon, taking up to Tk 200 extra per trip.

They are able to get away with ripping off people already under economic stress as government initiatives to stop overcharging have largely failed.

Tens of thousands of people leave Dhaka, Gazipur, and Narayanganj every Eid to spend the holidays with their loved ones in other districts and the authorities have never been able to stop them from being taken advantage of.

Even Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader at a meeting on April 9 admitted that coach service providers were overcharging.

"Charging [the passengers] extra has not stopped. In some cases, it has come down slightly but it has not stopped. Many vehicles take passengers away from the bus stations where there is monitoring," he told reporters.

According to an estimate by Bangladesh Jatri Kalyan Samity, a passenger welfare platform, around 1.2 crore people will leave only Dhaka ahead of this Eid.

Sujan Ahmed, who works at a firm, bought two AC bus tickets of Hanif Enterprise on April 10 to go to Rangpur on April 19. He was charged Tk 2,400 for each ticket that had a premium of Tk 900.

"Price of each ticket was Tk 1,500 even a few days ago," he told this correspondent yesterday.

Speaking to this paper, another person wishing anonymity said an SR Plus Paribahan April-17 ticket to Rangpur cost Tk 2,400 on April 9.

"Tickets for April 18, 19 and 20 were also being sold for Tk 2,400," the person said, adding that the usual price is Tk 1,800.

The situation at Shohoz.com, where many buy bus tickets online, was no different.

For instance, a person going to Gaibandha yesterday on Alhamra's AC coaches was charged Tk 900, but the same trip would cost Tk 1,600 on April 18.

Hanif Enterprise charged Tk 2,100 for yesterday's trip to Panchagarh on its AC coaches, but a trip on the same bus would cost Tk 2,900 on April 18.

Jubaer Hossain, vice-president (business) of Shohoz said, "Bus operators fix the ticket prices and we just provide them ticketing services. We have nothing to do regarding the fares."

Hanif Enterprise General Manager Mosharref Hossain told The Daily Star yesterday, "We have increased the fares like other AC bus operators on the northern routes. Because the hot weather and possible jams on the highway during the Eid rush will increase our expenditure."

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**Sujan Ahmed, who works at a private firm, bought two AC-bus tickets of Hanif Enterprise on April 10 to go to Rangpur on April 19. He was charged Tk 2,400 for each ticket that had a premium of Tk 900.**



Students readying sculptures at Dhaka University's Fine Arts faculty last night for the Mangal Shobhajatra today. The Mangal Shobhajatra, a colourful mass procession brought out in the morning of Pahela Baishakh, has long been considered an expression of the nation's secular identity and a way to promote harmony. It was declared an intangible cultural heritage by UNESCO in 2016.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

**REAL ESTATE**  
FBCCI calls for blanket amnesty to black money

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry yesterday demanded the reinstatement of the scope to invest black money in real estate without any question for five to 10 years to curb capital flight.

The demand came at a pre-budget discussion organised by the National Board of Revenue and the FBCCI.

Earlier in February, the Real Estate and Housing Association of Bangladesh made the same request considering the depressed state of the sector.

The scope to clean black money through investment in real estate without any question asked about the source of income provided a certain amount of tax is paid as per the size and location of the properties ended on June 30, 2021.

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# 5.5pc growth is not insignificant

Says top IMF official on growth forecast for 2023

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The 5.5 percent growth forecast made by the International Monetary Fund for the Bangladesh economy would be decent given the pressure emanating from the external side, said a top official of the multilateral lender yesterday.

"The growth you have right now is not insignificant," Krishna Srinivasan, director of the IMF's Asia and Pacific department, told a virtual press briefing as part of the World Bank-IMF spring meeting taking place in Washington DC from April 10-16.

In its flagship World Economic Outlook, the Washington-based multilateral lender maintained that the Bangladesh economy would at best grow at 5.5 percent in 2023 -- behind only the Maldives and India in South Asia.

This comes after the WB and the Asian Development Bank earlier made growth forecasts of 5.2 percent and 5.3 percent respectively for this fiscal year, which ends on June 30.

The government though is maintaining the growth this fiscal year would be 6.5 percent.

"It [growth] has been affected by what is happening on the external demand and the risk coming from slowing markets in the US and Europe, which will bear upon on Bangladesh's exports and so on," Srinivasan said.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, exports brought home \$41.7 billion, up 8.07 percent year-on-year but missing the periodic target by \$542.4 million, according to data from the Export Promotion Bureau.

"As these external headwinds ease, there should be an uptake on upside potential to growth," Srinivasan said.

Subsequently, the IMF forecast growth will bounce back to 6.5 percent in 2024.

"Bangladesh is one country which was severely impacted by the war in Ukraine. The terms of trade moved against Bangladesh. It led to stresses on fiscal and external accounts. In response to that, Bangladesh proactively

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# BORO PROCUREMENT Govt set to buy 16.5 lakh tonnes in 4-month drive

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has decided to buy 16.5 lakh tonnes of Boro rice and paddy in a four-month drive beginning next month.

The decision was taken during a Food Planning and Monitoring Committee (FPMC) meeting, held at the Secretariat yesterday with Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder in the chair.

The meeting also proposed to raise the procurement price by Tk 2 per kg.

The price of paddy will be Tk 30 per kg, up from Tk 28 per kg last year. The parboiled rice will be procured at Tk 44 per kg, which was Tk 42 per kg last year.

The minister said the price has been hiked to benefit farmers.

"It is a proposal and will be finalised upon the consent of the prime minister," he said, adding that the procurement will begin on May 7 and will continue till August 31.

In this Boro procurement season, 4 lakh tonnes of paddy and 12.5 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice will be procured. The government also has set a target of buying 1 lakh tonnes of wheat at Tk 35 per kg.

Last year, the government could fulfil its target of procuring 11 lakh tonnes of parboiled rice, Food Secretary Ismiel Hossain told The Daily Star.

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# Nation pays tribute to Zafrullah

He will be laid to rest after Juma prayers today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A torrent of tributes poured in from people of all walks of life for valiant freedom fighter and Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury at the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday.

Eminent personalities, politicians, civil society members, environmentalists, social and cultural activists started arriving at the Shaheed Minar with wreaths before Zafrullah's body was brought there around 10:00am. Despite the scorching heat, the long queue of people reached the nearby Nursing College Gate.

Zafrullah died on Tuesday night at Gonoshasthaya Nagar Hospital. He had been suffering from kidney, liver and other health problems.

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A guard of honour is being given to Dr Zafrullah Chowdhury, Liberation War veteran and Gonoshasthaya Kendra founder, at the Central Shaheed Minar in the capital around 12:30pm yesterday. Before that, people paid their last respects to Dr Zafrullah.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

# GRAFT CASE Charges framed against Tarique, Zubaida

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against BNP acting chairman Tarique Rahman and his wife Zubaida Rahman in absentia in a graft case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission in 2007.

Before the charges were read out, Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court dismissed a petition, filed by the couple's lawyer Masud Ahmed Talukder on March 29, seeking permission to defend them in their absence.

In the order, the judge said the defence had no jurisdiction to file such a petition for defending the fugitives accused in their absence.

The court fixed May 16 for starting trial of the case. During the hearing of the petition, Masud cited different rulings of the higher courts in which a fugitive accused can get their lawyer if they are unable to appear before the court concerned due to security reasons.

ACC Public Prosecutor Mosharraf Hossain Kajol opposed the petition, saying that both the High Court and Supreme Court had settled the issue and ruled that a fugitive cannot get any lawyers to defend them in court in their absence.

Tarique and Zubaida have been in London since 2008. While Tarique is also accused in 15 other cases, mostly during the caretaker government in 2007 and 2008, Zubaida has been indicted in only one. No other case was filed against her in the country.

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